



November

Magnifying Glass:

Psalm 34

BY Joy Corn

My eyes are older than they used to be. I find myself using the zoom feature to look at photos on my phone; enlarging the font on an email, and even pulling out a magnifying glass to read a document's fine print. Not to mention trying to pluck eyebrows and stray whiskers! In fact, I've discovered I must use both my close-up vision lenses and a magnifying mirror to see if there is even something to be plucked! As much as I dislike seeing the wrinkles up close, I need the mirror to enlarge my features to see what I'm doing.

Makeup mirrors are sold with varying degrees of magnification. The downside of mirrors with the highest magnification is they highlight every flaw in such great (and almost scary) detail. However, when the same mirror magnifies my granddaughter's young, wrinkleless face, her beauty is only more striking.

Psalm 34 opens with David exhorting us to magnify the Lord with him, to exalt His name together (verse 3). He makes the case that as we magnify our wonderful Lord, His perfection and beauty will be all the more striking.

A former principal at my school habitually reminded students that bringing glory to God is, "to give other people the right opinion of whom God is," by the way we live. Scripture tells us to give God the glory He deserves, not because He would lack glory without it; but because magnifying Him is part of what we were created and commanded to do. Consequently, we find purpose, fulfillment, and pleasure. In verse 3, the word "magnify" means "make great." God is already great (without our help), but in magnifying Him, we are creating awareness of God's

greatness in those who may not recognize it otherwise.

When we magnify Him, we call attention to the multi-faceted grace He offers. His attributes of love and righteousness are displayed, and others see His mercy and compassion. And the more we “enlarge” (magnify) Him, like a jeweler examining a multi-faceted diamond, the more we understand His majesty and power are beyond our comprehension, and the more we realize His ways are higher than our ways. Magnifying Him makes all else small in comparison. Magnifying Him calms our troubled spirits and eases our anxious souls.

David’s Predicament

Psalm 34 is one of thirteen psalms where David gives the backdrop specifics. The superscription says, “A Psalm of David, when he changed his behavior before Abimelech; who drove him away, and he departed.” The event is recounted in I Samuel 21:10-22:1. The Philistine king is called Achish, but the dynastic title of Philistine kings was Abimelech, as in the title of the psalm. This psalm was written when David, a once-trusted general and champion of Israel, was on the run from King Saul who had tried to kill him. The little song, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” (I Samuel 18:7) made Saul irrationally jealous. Though he had done nothing to deserve the hatred of Saul, David ran for his life, ending up in Philistine territory in danger. King Achish learned David was hiding out in his city, and his counselors considered him a serious threat. Thinking quickly to avoid certain death, David faked madness. (Presumably, he thought one of two outcomes would mean protection for him. Either Achish would pity his condition as a madman and give him shelter, or Saul would consider him harmless and find it needless to capture or kill him. Unfortunately, Achish was unwilling to harbor a madman, and David continued to hide in the cave of Adullam to avoid Saul.)

David’s Path

Verse 4 tells that David had three reactions to this harrowing situation: He feared, he sought, and he cried out.

He was afraid. (A very human reaction.) He was in fear because of Saul and his irrational attempts to kill him. David also feared the power of Achish and the Philistine army. And, no doubt, he was afraid of how the fallout from feigning madness would affect his family and those dear to him. All his fears were justified under the circumstances. But, even so, David writes, “He delivered me from all my fears.”

We should magnify the Lord because He offers deliverance from the daunting things that worry, scare, and hound us the most. The unknowns of life don’t have to consume us. Deliverance is available in the One who is love because “perfect love casts out fear” (I John 4:18). God loves us, and we don’t have to live in fear. “Turn your eyes upon Jesus. Look full in His wonderful face, and the things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.” (Howarth, Helen, Turn Your Eyes Upon Jesus)

What about your situation causes you to fear the future?

How does magnifying God keep you from being paralyzed by fear?

Verse 4 also tells us David wisely sought the help of One greater than either Saul or Achish, who were the source of his fears. “I sought the LORD ...” He knew where to turn, and he placed his confidence in One greater than himself.

Here, David uses the covenant name for God. When we see “LORD” in all caps in the King James Bible, the translators’ are alerting us that this name was used by God when He responded to Moses’ question, “Whom shall I say has sent me?” The answer was, “I AM THAT I AM.” Say that, “I AM hath sent me unto you” (Exodus 3:13-14). That covenant name reminds us of all God has been in the past and the promise that He continues to be whom He has always been. The same confidence and freedom from fear that David enjoyed can also be ours, because God never changes. His mercies are new every morning, and today, He is the same mighty God who acted on David’s behalf and on behalf of countless others in Scripture. He met our needs yesterday,

last week, and last year. We need not fear because His name holds His track record of absolute faithfulness.

Verse 6 tells us David felt undeserving as he cried out (“This poor man cried...”). The word poor means “low status.” No one was looking at him with respect. David as a king possessed the power to command his circumstances; however, at this time in his life he saw himself as powerless and insignificant. The verb tense in verses 4 and 6 tell us his cry was a determined cry. Though he felt undeserving, David directed his cry to the all-powerful God who loved him. He was determined to be heard by the One who could help his situation. David’s prayers silenced his fears.

We should magnify the Lord because He begs us to call unto Him, and allow Him to demonstrate His power in the hopeless situations of life (Jeremiah 33:3). He invites us to come boldly, (not in muted, fearful tones), and expectantly with our requests (Hebrews 4:16). When we cry out, we find grace to help.

This “cry” reminds me of a sermon from Hebrews 2:18 that I once heard. “He is able to succour them that are tempted.” The word succour means “to run to the cry.” The preacher had us picture a nursing mother responding to the cries of an infant. She doesn’t feel inconvenienced when her baby cries; she is not annoyed as the hunger pangs are expressed; she will not be indifferent to cries when her child is hurt or frightened. Instead, her motherly instincts cause her to run to the cry.

In the same way, when we cry out, as David did, God will run to our cry. The problem is that too many times we don’t cry out. By our silence, we are saying, “I can handle this myself. I don’t need You.” David quickly acknowledged his neediness and cried out to God, who ran to his cry.

Have you brought your fears to the Lord?

Have you admitted to God that you need Him?

David’s Praise

The psalm also gives us instructions about how we are to magnify the Lord. David models some practical

guidelines for our praise.

He was resolute in praise. Verse 1 says, “I will ...” Praise was a deliberate practice with David, an act of the will. Our busy lives and ‘the cares of this world’ can easily distract us from magnifying the Lord as we should. Sometimes we turn the spotlight on ourselves and magnify our own accomplishments rather than giving glory to God, who gave us the ability and opportunity to succeed. A multitude of things without eternal significance can occupy our time, if we do not resolve to magnify the Lord with our lives.

Who is watching you? As they observe your day-to-day life, do they see you intentionally placing the magnifying glass on the Savior to bring to light His magnificence?

As the old song asks, “can the world see Jesus in you?”

David’s praise was continual. He says, “I will at all times...” One of the distinguishing characteristics of the spiritually mature is they praise the Lord when they feel like it and when they do not.

The New Testament reminds us over and over to give thanks in everything. Thanksgiving is a crucial component of prayer: “In everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known unto God, and the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6-7). If we are looking for the blessing of God’s peace that passes understanding as we face our own trials and fears, we should start with fulfilling the admonition to give thanks in everything (I Thessalonians 5:18), in the good times and the bad, in sickness and in health, in poverty and in wealth. Everything.

David had an audible praise. Verse 1 says, “His praise shall continually be in my mouth.” Articulating our praise to God is part of magnifying Him to others as we are witnesses to His faithfulness, but it has the byproduct of doing us good as well. Our own spirits are renewed as we focus on the goodness of God and actually say out loud what He has done for us.

Years ago my young cousin Ashley attended a tent



meeting with my grandmother. The singing, preaching, and atmosphere were all quite different from the rather formal church services with which she was accustomed. As the service unfolded, several people shouted their praise to the Lord. After about 45 minutes, Ashley leaned over and whispered, “Mamaw, while you weren’t looking, I stood up and said ‘Hallelujah!’” There is something about spoken praise that sends it deeper inside us. When it comes to verbally praising the God of the universe, we should never be timid or embarrassed.

His was a God-centered praise. According to verse 2, David made his boast “in the LORD.” This verse is one more reminder that it is not about us. The Lord should be the focus of all our worship and praise. We are simply the recipients of His blessings.

Do your conversations brag about what the Lord has done, or are they all in first person?

Do others think of you as one who gives God the glory?

His praise was contagious. David says, “the humble shall hear thereof and be glad” (verse 2), and he goes on to actively enlist others to join in the praise of God, “O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together” (verse 3). Some things are just too good to keep to yourself!

Who have you recruited to join you in magnifying the Lord?

How have you helped those around you to “praise God from whom all blessings flow”?

David’s Promise

David now recites several of the Lord’s promises he had seen fulfilled in his own life. In verse 7, he says the Lord is a deliverer and calls attention to the protecting ministry of angels, (the same ministry woven into many events of the Bible and the stories of church history). When verse 7 talks about “the Angel of the Lord,” Bible scholars agree this is a reference to the pre-incarnate manifestation of Jesus.

Verses 8-10 tell us that the Lord is a deliverer from distress. David compares the Lord to something which is particularly tasty. “O taste and see that the Lord is good.” By taste and by sight, we make discoveries and we have enjoyment. When we “taste and see” God’s goodness, we take notice of it and find comfort in it.

Someone said that the difference between a mere optimist and a Christian optimist is that the former lives by the principle that life is good, and the latter by the principle that God is good. David states the truth in verse 9, “There is no want to them that fear him.” Then he illustrates in verse 10, “the young lions do lack,

and suffer hunger..." "Young lions" paints a picture of vigorous and powerful hunters, but David says sometimes even they go hungry. Verse 10 concludes with the contrast, "But those who seek the LORD shall not lack any good thing."

David's Plea

The psalmist's experience of God's gracious deliverance compels him to invite others to share his experience. The psalm concludes with a series of practical pleas to those readers enduring problems. David urges us to put the Lord to the test (verse 8). The emphasis is on the experiential nature of the test. If you are going to taste something, you must commit yourself to taste it. Many political candidates say, "I stand on my record." Our faith stands on the record of what God has done, on the record of His promises kept. John 20:31 says, "These are written that you may believe." Faith is not inherited, nor does it come by accident. Faith comes by hearing the Word of God and discovering that God keeps His promises. Faith is "standing on the promises."

The following verses give practical admonitions from one who is older and wiser.

Fear the Lord (verse 11):

This is a learned behavior ("I will teach you..."). It does not happen automatically, but is developed over time as we put the Lord to the test.

Control the tongue (verses 12-13):

The reward is expressed first in verse 12. If we desire abundant life (many days of seeing good), verse 13 tells us the outcome is tied to controlling our tongues.

Forsake evil (verse 14):

This verse presents the negative side. Sam Jones, a famous evangelist from the 1800's, often offered this admonishment: "We have to quit our meanness!"

Follow peace (verse 14):

Now the positive side...we must actively pursue peace and good. Jesus said, "Blessed are the peacemakers" (Matthew 5:9). We are not to be simply peacekeepers (promoting the absence of war), but peacemakers,

taking an active role in bringing peace to discordant situations.


Psalm 34 reminds us many of the greatest opportunities to magnify the Lord come in times of testing. David was in a life-threatening situation full of anxiety and fear most of us cannot imagine, yet in the worst of circumstances, he praised the Lord.

Billy Graham is credited with saying, "The will of God will never lead you where the grace of God cannot keep you." That's another way of saying with Paul, the apostle, that we never have temptations greater than we can bear (I Corinthians 10:13). We pray for lighter burdens when we ought to pray for stronger backs. We pray for an easier path when we ought to pray for tougher feet. We pray for fewer problems when we ought to pray for better solutions.

You're the only Bible some people will ever read. Are you providing an "enlarged" picture of the all-sufficient God who can see you through every trial?

Are you allowing God to do a work in you that will illustrate to others His faithfulness and power?

Are you giving other people the right opinion of whom God is by your actions and reactions?

A magnifying glass enlarges our view and we perceive things that would not be noticeable without it. But the same magnifying glass can also start a fire if focused on the sun's rays. As we raise our magnifying glass to our magnificent Savior, and His radiance shines through, may a flame be kindled that burns brightly to the dark world around us. May we demonstrate to them how that flame guides us through the dark times in our lives. 

"O magnify the Lord with me, and let us exalt His name together!" *About the Writer: Joy Corn lives in Ashland City, Tennessee, and has been married to her husband (a former pastor) for 44 years. After 34 years of teaching middle school math, she recently retired and is delighted to be spending more time with her husband and three grandchildren. She enjoys singing (especially harmony), substituting for the pianist, helping in the nursery, and leading a monthly ladies' Bible study at Ashland City Free Will Baptist Church.*